2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Awetkoma

VI

The Supernatural

Death

● 83 When Waikomé's baby fell ill, she sat all day gazing at it in desperation. "Will you give me some medicine for it?" said Ndîli, its father, to me. "What is the matter with it?" I asked. "I don't know; it's just hot, hot," he replied, and his face and voice were utterly despairing. "If I don't know what's the matter with it, I can't give you anything," I said, and Ndîli walked away. When I returned to camp, Waikomé was keening. Tears streamed down her face, and her voice rose in a loud rhythmic wail as she spoke of her dead relatives. "I long to see my father who always gave me food. I have been forgetting my mother. Will I see her again?" These formulae are recited on every occasion of mourning, and it does not matter who the dead or dying person is. As the baby grew worse and seemed to lapse into a coma, Waikomé completely lost control of herself. Her face became terribly distorted with fear and grief, and she tried to make the poor little thing on her lap suckle. She rubbed her hand over its face and attempted to pry the rigid jaws apart with her finger so that she could pour her milk between the lips. Again and again she tried to force this symbol of life into the child's mouth, but in vain. The more susceptible women around her keened too, and finally Ndîli began to weep and to keen loudly. As Ndîli's emotion became more intense he turned in anger on the people sitting around in sympathetic silence: "Why did you and Julio bring me here into the forest? If we had stayed at the post my baby would never have fallen ill!"

No one uttered a word in reply. They were utterly helpless. Waikomé, beside herself, could think of nothing to offer her baby but her breast, with which she had nourished three other children and which to her was a source of life and healing. Ndîli handed her some "medicine," a pounded

66
Ndili handed her some medicine, a pounded herb mixed with water, and she tried to force that between the child's lips; but it only trickled down its chin. Some of the women sought to help her by heating their hands over the fire and laying them on the baby.

When it seemed that the child must surely die, Waipó left camp to call the others of our hunting party, for when the ghost-souls are about they may take away the living; and the Kaingáng feel the need for each other's protection and "live piled up."

When I climbed into my hammock that night, there had been a lull in the weeping, but I was awakened several hours before dawn by the frantic keening of Waikomé. One by one, others joined her, and I knew then that the baby was dead. As I watched, the emotion gradually grew more intense; and some went to join the group mourning around the child. There was no play-acting here, no singling out of those whom relationship obliged to weep from those who could just look on. Those who were not affected kept aloof and performed their daily tasks, but those who felt an identification with the bereaved parents mourned with them. Ndili's second cousin sat with his arm around him and wept, but Ndili's brother seemed entirely untouched and soon went off to get honey. At last, late in the morning, the parents took up their little bundle and went away, and the sound of their keening came back to us through the forest.

That day no one went hunting even though there was no meat in camp. Toward noon Waipó said to me, his voice intense with fear: "You'd better pack your things, because we're going away from here right away. We thought we would stay and kill another tapir, but the baby died; and now we have to move." Who knows what might have happened if they had remained? The ghost-soul of the baby might have taken someone along with it or the ghost-soul which had killed it might kill again. It really does the Kaingáng no good to flee from the ghost-soul, for although it has a tendency to lurk about the place where the bones of its dead body are buried, it also is nomadic like the Kaingáng and may dog their footsteps wherever they go.

If we think of death among ourselves and the demonstrations that accompany it among the less inhibited members of our own society; if we disregard for a moment the wild surroundings, the rhythmic keening, the fear of the ghost-soul, and even, perhaps, the useless medicine that was forced between the choking child's lips (although, Heaven knows, that too might be easily duplicated in our society), we cannot but see a striking resemblance between the grief of Waikomé and Ndili and the members of their group and similar displays in our own society. Among ourselves, anger is generally thrust into the background and often disappears entirely when grief is sincere, but among the Kaingáng it pervades the entire scene and manifests itself in an irritability that may easily become anger. It is

2: Henry E-5 (1932-1934) 1941
SM3 Caingang SM3
Awelkoma

difficult to talk to many of the Kaingáng on these occasions because they are so easily enraged, and the ethnologist had best hold his tongue and try to appear as small as possible. In death the Kaingáng feel a threat to their security. As they put it, "We are afraid of the ghost-souls; so we come together and live piled up." As in the feuds, no one knows when the deaths will cease. The presence of death lays bare the very fiber of the Kaingáng personality, for it is in terms of this emotional amalgam in which anger and fear are indistinguishably fused that we must understand all of their behavior in times of stress.

In 1918 when the first wave of the grippe struck the Kaingáng, killing them in such numbers that their bodies lay about unburied until the dogs ate them, Thunder Storm rose up in his rage and fear and beat the air and trees with a club. "When disease came," said his son to me, "my father beat the trees because he was afraid of the supernatural beings (*nggiyáde*). He said, 'If I see you, I'll kill you. You are *wasĩgyú*[1] and kill us all the time. So if I see you come to me, I'll kill you! The Brazilians kill my relatives; so out of revenge I destroy them when I see them! When I see them, I kill them, and I'll do the same to you—when I see you, I'll kill you!' He spoke thus as he beat the trees." Nothing could express this side of the Kaingáng character and world-view better. Here is condensed the Kaingáng frantic fear and anger at the forces of death, the equation of the supernatural with any other enemy, and the identification of the situation created by death with the vendetta tradition and revenge.

The Kaingáng not only fight with death; they also fly from it. That is why Waipó told me that we must move on when Ndíli's baby died, and that is why old Kakthí moved out of her house when the grippe descended again in 1933. "Why has she left her house?" said I to her son-in-law. "She is afraid of our sickness. She said, 'If I stay there, I'll get sick'; so she went away. She is in the forest to get away from it. She went to another place so our sickness would not see her." Poor Kakthí fled in vain, for she soon fell ill and died. "Her [dead] husband called her, and that is why she died. Our ghost-souls led her off, and that is why she died. Her husband's ghost-soul led her away, and that is why she died. She lay there telling about it, and then she died. The supernatural beings and her husband's soul led her away. He [her husband] led her away so that he might go with her."

The ghost-soul loves and pities the living whom it has deserted, but the latter fear and abhor the ghost-soul. The ghost-soul longs for those it has left behind, but they remain cold to its longing. "One pities one's children and therefore goes with them [i.e. takes them] when one dies. One loves [literally, lives in] one's children, and dies and goes with one's children, and one [i.e. the child] dies." The dead pity those they have left alone with

[1] Vicious, aggressive.